

WHEDA COVID-19 Response

Wisconsin Housing and Economic Development Authority
Special Achievement: COVID-19 Response

HFA Staff Contact

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Overview

The Wisconsin Housing and Economic Development Authority (WHEDA) started its adjusted operations model due to COVID-19 on March 16, 2020. In response to the pandemic, the Authority established new communications, policies, and procedures to assist its employees, homebuyers, renters, affordable housing providers, partners, and other constituents throughout the COVID-19 crisis.

Internal Operations

To support our employee transition to working remotely as part of Wisconsin's Safer at Home order, WHEDA's instituted the following operational measures:

- Implemented an adjusted operations model in order to protect employees and the communities we service.
- Instituted a weekly All Staff conference call every Monday morning hosted by WHEDA CEO Joaquín Altoro to provide key updates and success stories.
- Creation and deployment of The Chevron, an employee newsletter to provide employees with regular, consistent communications highlighting important operational information.
- Development of a repository of employee COVID-19 resources, policies, and FAQs accessible 24/7 on WHEDA's employee intranet site.
- Establishing an Authority-wide issues log for managers to record/track constituent questions and concerns. Issues log reviewed regularly by management for follow-up and to identify reoccurring themes other public communications.

External Customer Support

WHEDA also adjusted its operations to assist low- to moderate-income homebuyers, renters, affordable housing providers and other partners throughout the COVID-19 crisis. WHEDA's adaptive actions included:

- Working with WHEDA homeowners on an individual basis to keep people in their homes. This has included payment forbearance and, in some cases, permanent loss mitigation options to bring the accounts current.
 - Mortgage Loan Advisors have done an excellent job working with existing WHEDA homeowners experiencing financial challenges due to COVID-19. As of June 29, 2020, WHEDA has a total of 326 loans in forbearance representing 1.5% of our mortgage portfolio, far below the Wisconsin and national averages.
- To help WHEDA small business customers and reduce costs of accessing capital, WHEDA waived origination fees for small business loan guarantees. WHEDA also suspended forbearance fees to help businesses work through payments on existing bank loans backed by a WHEDA loan guarantee.
- To help commercial loan holders, WHEDA has been working on a case-by-case basis to provide financial and reporting flexibility to help keep renters housed and keep properties in compliance.

- WHEDA partnered with the Wisconsin Department of Administration to help promote the \$25 million Wisconsin Rental Assistance Program (WRAP) to its network of property managers to help residents behind in their rent payments stay housed. The WRAP program was funded by the federal CARES Act.

Partner Engagement

Because WHEDA is recognized as a statewide expert on affordable housing, WHEDA new outreach efforts due to COVID-19 have included:

- Development of an online FAQ organized by customer type highlighting available resources from WHEDA and other industry partners.
- Bulk and targeted email distributions highlighting WHEDA financing products and our detailed online FAQs along with coordinated social media posts to connect customers to available resources.
- Hosted a virtual press conference with Wisconsin Governor Tony Evers to announce over \$30 million in housing tax credits to advance affordable housing and spur economic development. Over 100 community stakeholders and members of the media attended.
- Started a WHEDA webinar series to highlight resources available for industry partners.
- WHEDA generated collaborative social posts with graphics and video on its commercial loan closings to highlight WHEDA's financial support and partner engagement on new developments

Summary

Through our innovative outreach and adjust operations model due to COVID-19, WHEDA has reached thousands of people in new ways. We have experienced over 10,000 opens on our customer email blasts and have served more than 500 people through our newly created WHEDA Webinar series. Furthermore, we have experienced increase followers and engagement across all of our social channels.

Access WHEDA's online COVID-19 FAQ's here: <https://www.wheda.com/about-wheda/press-room/stakeholder-statements/covid-19-update/covid-19-faqs>

Access information about WHEDA's webinar series here: <https://www.wheda.com/about-wheda/press-room/events/webinars>

Additional attachments include:

- WHEDA's standard operating procedures for working remotely
- The Chevron, WHEDA's employee eNewsletter
- Screen shot of wheda.com FAQs
- Screen shot of WHEDA Housing Tax Credit virtual news conference



Standard Operating Procedures for Working Remote

Purpose

In response to the COVID-19 pandemic, WHEDA has implemented an adjusted operations model in order to protect our employees and the communities that we serve. WHEDA will retain an essential workforce at its Madison Office to perform daily, critical onsite activities as identified in our business continuity plan; all other WHEDA employees will work remotely. This Standard Operating Procedure (SOP) is intended to provide guidance for WHEDA employees while working remotely. This is a fluid document and the SOP will be monitored and updated as conditions change.

Responsibilities

Executive Office
Senior Leadership
Managers
All departments

Procedures

Communications

Effective and productive communication is paramount, and we must take a 360-degree approach: no matter who you are engaging with – manager to staff, staff to manager, peer to peer.

Make sure to over-communicate: decide what needs to be shared with your team, across teams or enterprise wide. Work with your manager/director as needed.

Internal

Ensure team members have access to managers and/or directors.

- Share your calendar so that team members can see your availability
- Team members should feel as if they are a local employee with availability to “pop in” if they have a quick question
- Provide your cell or home number to team members

Compile team members’ contact information and disseminate to your team.

Establish the best way to communicate within your team, whether via phone, email, video conference, etc.

Schedule regular check-ins with your team; minimum of once a week.

- Utilize videoconferencing as much as possible to maintain team engagement
- Create and send out a team meeting agenda to guide discussion

Schedule regular one-on-one check-ins with individual team members; minimum of once a week.

- Utilize videoconferencing as much as possible to maintain engagement.

- Identify key projects to be worked on and establish clear expectations for completing work
- Identify how and when team members can contact you outside of regular check-ins, i.e. phone, text, email

Create a communication strategy to clearly set expectations for communications amongst your team. The communication strategy should include, but is not limited to:

- Turnaround time to respond to communications
- Scheduled check-ins
- Guidelines for responding to daily operational needs
- Responding to urgent situations
 - Define “urgent” for your team
 - Communicate protocol to address urgent situations
 - Identify communication tool(s) to be used for urgent situations
 - Text messages
 - Phone calls
- Avoid multitasking when on calls with your team
- Protocol for requesting time off

External

Inform the Marketing and Communications team about communications-related issues that they should be aware of in a timely manner; work with your manager/director as needed.

- Direct media inquiries as soon as possible to Jennifer Sereno, Public Affairs Program Manager at (608) 770-8084 or Jennifer.sereno@wheda.com
- If you have an external customer inquiry that you not sure how to handle, work directly with your manager. If your manager is unavailable, contact the Marketing and Communications team at marketing@wheda.com for assistance.
- If you have questions regarding information on wheda.com or whedanet, work with Chris Scholtens, Sr. Web Designer at chris.scholtens@wheda.com.

Confidentiality

All work from home is expected to be completed with the highest level of confidentiality such as would be maintained in the office. “Personally identifiable information” should not be locally saved on your home computer.

Culture

Culture is significantly important now more than ever during this period. Everyone experiences change and stress differently and managers/directors should have awareness of their team’s well-being.

Strategies to implement should include, but are not limited, to:

- Be intentional about building community and employee engagement, utilizing videoconferencing as often as possible
- Be respectful and kind to each other
- Be appreciative of everyone’s efforts during this time
 - “Thank You” goes a long way
- Continue to celebrate
 - Small/big wins
 - Birthdays

- Work anniversaries
- If you are frustrated, give yourself a cool-off period before engaging with a teammate.

Ensure that team members are aware of the Employee Assistance Program (EAP):

- FEI Behavioral Health: 1-800-236-7905 and www.feieap.com
 - Username: wheda

Any suggestions relating to culture during this period of working remotely can be sent to May yer Thao at mayyer.thao@wheda.com to bring forth to the Culture Steering Committee. This includes but is not limited to being intentional with sharing success stories as well as other tools and tips that we should share with our employees and stakeholders.

Finance

Check-Cutting

Accounting will be cutting checks every other week beginning March 31, 2020. If you have an emergency need, please forward it to the BIONIC.Team@wheda.com.

Accounts Payable

Please forward all Accounts Payable requests to Accounts.Payable@wheda.com.

Funding Needs

All other requests for fund transfers should be sent to BIONIC.Team@wheda.com.

Purchase Authorizations

Please forward to Procurement@wheda.com. Finance will schedule IPC as needed.

General

All internal approvals can be by email:

- If you have something that requires the CEO's approval, work with your manager/director to ensure it gets to him.
- Other approvals, please see your manager/director.
- Many documents can be approved electronically, however some approvals still require a wet signature.

Printing

Work with your manager/director if you need something printed. Where possible, essential staff in-office will mail to you.

Other Purchasing Needs

We want you to have the tools you need to do your work. Work with your manager/director to advise of needs you have. Kate Allen will be handling all orders and sending directly to you.

Human Resources (HR)

Safety

Make sure your team has set up a safe and hazard free work environment. Please report any accidents that may occur.

Schedule

A general schedule must be communicated to, and agreed upon, by your manager/director. Remote employees must be easily accessible each day with team members per their schedules.

- Deviations from that schedule should be communicated to your direct manager.
- Establish boundaries of when you are available: (ex: when is it appropriate to text or call - the earliest and latest time). Be respectful of others' availability.
 - Use calendars to indicate when you are "working" and when you are "not available"

Tracking of Time

Discuss the need to continue to track employees time in ADP. This needs to be done on the regular payroll schedule. Actual hours worked should be recorded. Leave time should be used for any non-worked hours. If you need help, please reach out to whedahr@wheda.com.

- Establish protocol for requesting PTO.
 - PTO should be used when employees do not feel well.
- Inform HR if someone is sick more than three (3) consecutive days.
 - Employee FMLA paperwork is required to be submitted.

IT

Employees will establish an appropriate work environment within his or her home for work purposes. WHEDA will not be responsible for costs associated with the setup of the employee's home office, such as remodeling, furniture or lighting, nor for repairs or modifications to the home office space.

Necessary IT equipment for working remotely will be handled by IT. Please work with your manager/director if you need equipment.

Assistance

Assistance from the IT Help Desk can be requested via email at wheda.helpdesk@wheda.com or via phone at (608) 267-1451.

Hardware

Employees have the option to utilize their own equipment to perform work. If that is not possible, WHEDA may supply the employee with the necessary equipment to perform work based on job function and need. Any WHEDA supplied equipment would need to eventually be returned to WHEDA when not needed anymore.

Software

VMWare Horizon Client:

VMware Horizon is a desktop and application virtualization solution. WHEDA uses Horizon to deliver applications to our remote workers from the servers in our data center. It allows us to securely deliver and manage applications from a central location.

Microsoft Teams

Microsoft Teams has been implemented for unified communication and collaboration. Teams allows for workplace chat, audio/video meetings, file storage, and application integration. Microsoft Teams has clients available for desktop (Windows, Mac, and Linux), web, and mobile

(Android and iOS). These clients all require an active Internet connection and do not support an offline mode.

The chats and documents in MS Teams are public records, and it is your obligation to treat and file them as such. Teams itself is not an acceptable repository for preserving these records.

Teams have been created based on the WHEDA org chart and other logical groups. To request a new team, change a team or remove a team please contact the Help Desk or submit an IT Service Request.

Internet Hot Spot

We have contracted with Verizon to provide mobile Internet Hot Spots for those employees that cannot get to the Internet any other way. Please work with your manager/director if you need Internet Hot Spot.

WisLine and GoToMeeting

(Both will eventually be retired in favor of Teams)

WisLine is run by UW Extension and is only an audio conference call service. GoToMeeting is a cloud-based service that allows for audio/video conferencing calls and desktop sharing.

Everything that can be done in Wisline and GoToMeeting can be done by Teams. As such, we will be retiring both Wisline and GoToMeeting in the future.

Security

Expect cyberattacks of all sorts. More people than ever are working from home, often with fewer security defenses on their home networks than they would have in the office. In times of stress or distraction, people are more likely to fall for malicious scams and tricks.

Best Practices and Ideas

During this period of working remotely, we encourage all WHEDA employees to be creative and implement best practices, such as, but not limited to the following:

- Start a list of backburner projects that you've always meant to "get to"
 - Organizing contacts
 - Moving business cards to outlook
- Participate in continuing education or professional development opportunities; work with your manager/director regarding time commitment and investment, if any
- Identify a "Best Friend at Work": who can you go to when you are stressed and just need a few minutes to vent without judgement?
- Keep a routine (ex: get up, get showered, get dressed)
- Don't sit at your PC all day!
 - Take a walk and get fresh air – keep six (6) feet distance from others who are also out
 - Plan breaks
 - Work a normal workday – don't feel like you must work extra, as others may be working different hours than yourself.

Sample employee eNewsletter



The Chevron

A Daily Update for WHEDA Employees

March 18, 2020

Tips to stay healthy, remain positive

As we all face uncertainty about the novel coronavirus and transition to our new way of operating, we need to remember to stay positive, remain flexible, support each other and stay calm. It is also important for us to take care of our physical and mental health. Some ways we can do this include:

- Eating healthy;
- Setting and maintaining a regular routine;
- Exercising at home if you are able;
- Getting fresh air from your yard, deck or patio;
- Finding new ways to connect with family and friends daily, such as texting, FaceTime, Skype;
- Taking time to engage in activities you find relaxing that you can do from home such as writing in a journal, meditating, reading, puzzles, crafts, cooking and board games.

Employee Assistance Program (EAP)

These are stressful times. Remember that WHEDA employees and family members have free access to the State of Wisconsin Employee Assistance Program (EAP) as part of our health insurance benefits. EAP provides counseling for issues such as stress, depression, balancing your work/personal life as well as coping with family and relationship concerns.

To learn more about EAP's comprehensive, confidential services go to https://dpm.wi.gov/Pages/How_Do_I/ContactEap.aspx.

Upcoming

- Senior staff and managers will be meeting tomorrow to continue our business continuity planning. They are also working on WHEDA's Standard Operating Procedures for remote workers and will share this information with all employees as soon as it is finalized.
- Remember that today is the last day for employees to access their workstations for any items needed to work remotely. It is very important for your health and safety, as well as the health and safety of others, that we all adhere to this request. If you need anything from the office after today, please contact your manager and we will work to get you what you need via mail or other delivery services.

IT Corner

- Equipment to assist our remote workforce has been ordered and most of these items have been delivered to the Madison office. IT is working diligently to inventory, setup and finish distributing equipment to those employees that need it to work remotely.
- On Tuesday, IT set up a Microsoft Teams account for every WHEDA department and the employees in each department. This is a wonderful tool for us to engage, communicate and collaborate with our co-workers.
- You can access Microsoft Teams from any web browser by following three steps:
 - Go to portal.office.com
 - Sign in using your WHEDA email / password
 - Click on the "Teams" application from the list of applications
 - Check your email for a message from Dan Zadra for more details on how to use Microsoft Teams.

Resources

Last night the State of Wisconsin launched a new web portal as a repository for all COVID-19 information and resources for Wisconsin residents. The link is listed below along with other resources.

www.Wisconsin.gov/covid19 (Note, this site replacing going directly to DHS)

IT Corner

- If you need IT assistance, please remember to contact the help desk at 608-267-1451 or wheda.helpdesk@wheda.com.
- To access your email and other Microsoft Office applications, you do not need to use VMWare Horizon, you can go to portal.office.com.
- We are still working to get all of our remote workers access to VMWare Horizon. Please only use VMWare to access what you need, then log off.

Additional resources

If you'd like background information on COVID-19 symptoms, transmission or other aspects of the illness, please use the following resources:

- [Public Health Madison & Dane County](#)
- [Wisconsin Department of Health Services](#)
- [Centers for Disease Control](#)

Wisconsin Housing & Economic Development Authority
1-800-334-6873 | www.wheda.com



Screen shot of WHEDA Customer FAQs

Find a WHEDA Lender | My Loan Online | eWHEDA | WHEDA-Connect | WHEDA Email Subscriptions | Search

WHEDA HOMEOWNERSHIP AND RENTERS | LENDING PARTNERSHIPS | DEVELOPERS AND PROPERTY MANAGERS

HOME / ABOUT / PRESS ROOM / STAKEHOLDER STATEMENTS / COVID-19 UPDATE / COVID-19 FAQs



WHEDA FAQs for homeowners, renters, housing providers in response to COVID-19

Last Updated 05/11/2020

Overview

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, WHEDA has adjusted operations to protect our employees and the communities we serve. We continue to deliver the level of service our customers have come to expect and we remain focused on expanding access to affordable housing and economic opportunity.

We sincerely appreciate your support and patience as we work together during this critical time to serve Wisconsin communities and residents.

As the scope of the COVID-19 pandemic changes, so does WHEDA's response. WHEDA also is monitoring developments related to the \$2 trillion fiscal stimulus bill. The bill contains billions for homeless assistance and rental assistance as well as provisions that place a moratorium on home foreclosures and provide forbearance from payments with no penalties or additional fees.

COVID-19 is creating a very fluid situation. WHEDA will continue to monitor and update these FAQs as conditions continue to change.

- Homeowners
- Renters
- Small Business
- Mortgage Lenders
- Developers
- Property Managers/Owners

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Screen shot of \$30 million WHEDA Housing Tax Credit virtual announcement by Wisconsin Governor Tony Evers

